

# RECLAMATION

*Managing Water in the West*

## DRAFT FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

# Tulare Irrigation District Plum Basin Project – Phase I

**FONSI-09-77**

Recommended by:

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## Introduction

In accordance with section 102(2)(c) of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA), as amended, the South-Central California Area Office of the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation), has determined that the approval to partially fund Phase I of Tulare Irrigation District's (TID) Plum Basin Project is not a major federal action that would significantly affect the quality of the human environment and an environmental impact statement is not required. This draft Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) is supported by Reclamation's draft Environmental Assessment (EA) number EA-09-77, *Tulare Irrigation District Plum Basin Project – Phase I*, and is hereby incorporated by reference.

Reclamation intends to provide the public with an opportunity to comment on the draft FONSI and draft EA from March 16, 2010 through April 9, 2010.

## Background

In January 2008, TID purchased 154-acres of property consisting of plum orchards and fallowed ground. In a joint-effort with the City of Tulare, TID prepared an Initial Study (IS) and finalized a Mitigated Negative Declaration (MND) in January 2009 to analyze the environmental impacts of converting the 154 acres of property into a three-cell recharge/regulation basin (Plum Basin Project). About this same time, TID applied to Reclamation for a Water for America Challenge Grant (Challenge Grant) and was selected as a potential recipient for federal funds to help develop the one of three cells of the Plum Basin Project.

Reclamation proposes to award TID with a Challenge Grant for the development of Phase I of the Plum Basin Project (Proposed Action). The Proposed Action would include converting 37 acres of fallowed ground into a basin (cell #1) with groundwater recharge and surface water regulating capabilities. The fallowed ground would be excavated up to 6 feet (ft) deep and the excavated materials would be used to build up 6-ft tall levees cell #1. Construction would also include inlet/outlet structures between the basin and TID's Main Canal. The inlet/outlet structures would be outfitted with control gates, flowmeters, and other related appurtenances.

## Findings

### Biological Resources

The project area consists of the conversion of recently fallowed land that is frequently tilled for weed control. Although San Joaquin kit fox and Swainson's hawk have been reported in the area, disking for weed control would seriously degrade any suitable habitat or foraging ground for sensitive species. Reclamation has determined that the Proposed Action would have no effect to either kit fox or Swainson's hawk designated under the Endangered Species Act (ESA), and no consultation with the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) is required. Preconstruction surveys would be conducted before any ground-disturbing activities are to begin. If the surveys detect the presence of listed species, then the Proposed Action would be paused while Reclamation revisits the ESA determination and completes any consultation with the USFWS that might be necessary.

If preconstruction surveys find that no special-status species are present within the project area, then Reclamation's determination remains and the project could move forward. By following Environmental Protection Measures listed in section 2.2.1 of the EA, this would avoid or minimize any potential impacts to kit fox or Swainson's hawk during construction. Therefore, the Proposed Action is anticipated to have no significant impacts on biological resources.

### **Cultural Resources**

The Proposed Action is the type of activity that has the potential to affect historic properties. A records search, a cultural resources survey, and Tribal consultation identified historic properties within the area of potential effects. All project activities would avoid historic properties; therefore, there would be no adverse impacts pursuant to 36 CFR Part 800.5(b). Since no historic properties would be affected, no cultural resources would be impacted as a result of implementing Proposed Action.

### **Indian Trust Assets (ITA)**

There are no tribes possessing legal property interests held in trust by the United States in the lands involved with the Proposed Action. The nearest ITA is the Santa Rosa Rancheria approximately 18 miles west/north-west of the project location; therefore, this action would have no significant impacts on ITA.

### **Socioeconomic Resources**

The Proposed Action would increase the surface water reliability for TID. As a result, the viability of farming practices would also benefit from a more reliable irrigation water supply. Design and construction of the Proposed Action would temporarily increase jobs; therefore, the Proposed Action could result in slight beneficial impacts to socioeconomic resources.

### **Environmental Justice**

To the extent that water supply reliability is improved in Tulare County, it would serve to support the continued viability of available municipal and industrial water to the surrounding communities and irrigation water for local farms. As a result, there would be slight beneficial impacts to environmental justice from the implementation of the Proposed Action.

### **Global Climate Change**

The Proposed Action would involve short-term impacts consisting of emissions during construction and long-term. Accordingly, project construction and operations under the Proposed Action would result in *de minimis* impacts to global climate change.

### **Cumulative Impacts**

Biological resources would continue to be affected by other types of activities that are ongoing but unrelated to the Proposed Action. Impacts to biological resources from the implementation of the Proposed Action would occur only during construction activities. Pending results from the kit fox and Swainson's hawk surveys, the Proposed Action, when added to other existing and proposed actions, does not contribute to cumulative adverse impacts to wildlife resources since construction activities are short-term.

Pending SHPO concurrence, the Proposed Action would not impact historic properties; therefore, it is not expected to contribute to cumulative impacts on cultural resources.

As analyzed in the TID's IS/MND construction of the overall Plum Basin Project would have less than significant impacts to water resources, land use, and air quality. Since the Proposed Action is a part of the Plum Basin Project, it would not contribute to adverse cumulative impacts to those resources. In addition, the Proposed Action would not impact ITA and therefore would not contribute to cumulative impacts to ITA.

Greenhouse gas (GHG) impacts are considered to be cumulative impacts. The Proposed Action, when added to other existing and proposed actions, would not contribute to adverse cumulative impacts to global climate change owing to the *de minimis* magnitude of annual GHG emissions.

The Proposed Action, when added to other similar existing and proposed actions, would have a slight beneficial contribution to cumulative impacts associated with environmental justice and socioeconomic resources. The Proposed Action would help support and maintain farm-related jobs that low-income and disadvantaged populations rely upon. In addition, some of these communities rely on groundwater as their main source of water supply so the long-term application of groundwater recharge would provide some replenishment to this source.